



# Kansas Preservation

*Newsletter of the Cultural Resources Division • Kansas State Historical Society*



*Topeka's historic Monroe School—rescued from possible demolition—was dedicated on May 17, 2004, as the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site by President George W. Bush.*

*Article on page 11*



# Brown v. Culmin

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*Cheryl Brown Henderson of the Brown Foundation introduced President George W. Bush at the dedication of the Brown v. Board National Historic Site. Photo by Donna Rae Pearson.*

**I**n the first decades following its construction in 1926, Topeka's Monroe School was one of the city's four all-black elementary schools. With the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision striking down the "Separate But Equal" doctrine, the school gained a place in American history. Parents of several Monroe students were plaintiffs in one of the five school desegregation cases combined into *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas et al.*

Amid the changes that followed the Brown ruling, the school building would have been lost had it not been for a group of dedicated volunteers. On May 17, 2004, Monroe School once again received national attention with its dedication as the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. The dedication represented not only a reflection on five decades of struggle toward equality, but also a celebration of the preservation of the historically significant Monroe School.

In the school's original design, Thomas Williamson, arguably Topeka's best regarded twentieth-century architect, employed reinforced board-formed concrete slabs, beams, and joists to create a structure that would stand the test of time. However, the building nearly did not survive its first half-century. In the years following

*Brown v. Board*, African-American students began enrolling in traditionally white schools; white students, however, did not enroll in the city's traditionally black schools. The trend resulted in a precipitous decline in Monroe's enrollment, which remained entirely African American. In 1958, just four years following the landmark case, the school's enrollment had fallen to 148, approximately one-third its capacity. Faced with the sharp decline in enrollment, the school district closed Monroe in 1975.

From the time of its closure, the school's future became progressively more uncertain. A 1970s rezoning of the surrounding neighborhood from residential to light industrial/commercial seemed to seal the neighborhood's fate, making it doubtful the building would ever again be used as a school. (Ironically, the school district then constructed a new science magnet school just one block to the north in 1995.)

The school district used the building for storage until 1980 when it sold the building to Richard Appelhans. Appelhans then sold the building in 1982 to Fairlawn Church of the Nazarene, which began remodeling the building for use as a dental clinic, clothing bank, and a halfway house. To accommodate the new use, the church made many changes to the building's interior, from

*The background on pages 11 and 12 and the front cover image of Monroe School soon after its construction are provided courtesy of the National Park Service.*



# *Brown v. Board Dedication Marks Culmination of Preservation Effort*

*Topeka's Monroe School  
draws attention to the issue of  
school desegregation as the home of the  
Brown v. Board of Education National  
Historic Site. Monroe School will  
tell the desegregation story for  
future generations.*



*View of the Monroe School following its restoration. Photo courtesy of National Park Service.*

installing partitions and closing in staircases to removing classroom walls and wood wardrobes. In 1988, soon after making irreversible changes, the church sold Monroe School. The new owners, S/S Builders, Inc., made additional interior changes to use the building for storage.

When S/S Builders' owner Mark Stueve posted an auction notice on the fence surrounding the building in 1990, many in the community feared the building would be demolished. A group of dedicated volunteers fought to stop the auction. Among them was Cheryl Brown Henderson, a daughter of *Brown v. Board* plaintiff Oliver Brown. Henderson had formed the Brown Foundation just two years earlier to carry on the effort toward educational equality. The group hoped to designate the building a National Historic Landmark that could serve to interpret the story of school integration.

The Brown Foundation's efforts bore fruit in 1991 when the Trust for Public Land purchased Monroe School and the building was designated a National Historic Landmark through an amendment to the National Historic Landmark nomination for Sumner School, an all-white school that some of the children of *Brown v. Board of Education* plaintiffs would have attended had the schools not been segregated. In 1992, the U. S. Congress passed Public Law 102-525 establishing Monroe School as the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site. Soon after this designation, in December 1993, the property was transferred to the National Park Service.

After obtaining title to Monroe School, the National Park Service (NPS) began planning for the building's restoration and rehabilitation. In 1996, the NPS published a General Management Plan that provided guidance on the interpretation of the site. The 1998 Historic Structures Report provided a history of the building's construction and renovations and put forth recommendations regarding restoration work. Exterior construction, including repointing, stone cleaning, steel window repair, and exterior door repair/replacement began in 2001; interior work began the next year. In 2003-2004, the exhibits and audio-visual equipment to accommodate the building's new interpretive visitors' center function were installed. The State Historic Preservation Office reviewed the plans in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Although Monroe School was saved, its context was compromised as neighborhood homes were condemned and demolished. Once again, national attention would play a part in the neighborhood's rehabilitation. The Brown Foundation worked with Congress to establish a Presidential Commission for the fiftieth anniversary of the Brown decision. This President-commissioned dedication would draw the media spotlight to the Monroe neighborhood—a prospect that spurred the City of Topeka to allocate federal funds from the Department of

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*Cont. on back cover*

*This article was prepared by Christy Davis, assistant director  
of the Cultural Resources Division.*

## Brown v. Board Dedication

*Cont. from page 12*

Housing and Urban Development to make neighborhood improvements including the construction of compatible infill houses, repair of existing houses, and repair of related infrastructure.

The Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site was dedicated on May 17, 2004, with remarks from Topeka Mayor James A. McClinton, U. S. Representative Elijah E. Cummings, Kansas congressional delegates, U. S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, U. S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior Craig Manson, U. S. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, U. S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Bryer, Governor Kathleen Sebelius, civil rights pioneer Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and President of the United States George W. Bush.

With approximately five thousand people in attendance, the dedication commemorated the progress made toward educational equality; addressed the necessity of recommitting to the civic responsibility of providing equal opportunity for all citizens; and celebrated the rescue of Monroe School, a site of national historical importance.

**The Kansas History Center and Museum will be closed Labor Day, September 6, 2004. Please check the online calendar at [kshs.org](http://kshs.org) for other dates and events.**

## Happenings in Kansas

### ***Willing to Die for Freedom: A Look Back at Kansas Territory***

April 3, 2004 - October 3, 2004  
Kansas Museum of History  
Kansas History Center  
6425 S.W. Sixth Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas  
*This exhibit both observes the territory's 150th anniversary and explores Kansas' free-state heritage.*

### ***Sights Once Seen***

June 1, 2004 - August 30, 2004  
Research Gallery  
Kansas History Center and Museum  
*The earliest form of photography is featured in this traveling exhibit recreating explorer John C. Fremont's 1853-54 expedition through the West. Over 100 daguerreotypes were taken in modern times by photographer Robert Schlaer, who retraced Fremont's route through present-day Kansas and beyond.*

### **Heritage Trust Fund Workshop**

September 16, 2004  
2:00 p.m.  
Koch Education Center, Second Floor  
Kansas History Center

### **KAA Fall Fling**

September 18-19, 2004  
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
Archeology Lab  
Kansas History Center

### **Heritage Trust Fund Workshop**

October 14, 2004  
10:00 a.m.  
Memorial Building, Third Floor,  
Alliance Room  
101 South Lincoln  
Chanute, Kansas

### **KSHS, Inc. Annual Meeting**

November 5, 2004  
Kansas History Center  
*Includes presentations of the Nyle H. Miller Local Historical Organization Award, Edgar Langsdorf Award, Edward H. Tihen Historical Publication Awards, John Ripley Local Organization Award, speakers, election of board members and officers, and recognition of retiring and emeritus board members and executive committee members.*

### **Lewis and Clark Living History Program**

November 6, 2004  
Kansas History Center  
*Captain Lewis' Company from the Frontier Army Living History Association will present a program on Lewis and Clark. Steve Allie will give a presentation on the food eaten by the men on the Corps of Discovery expedition. The program is free and open to the public.*

### **Heritage Trust Fund Workshop**

November 18, 2004  
10:00 a.m.  
Location To Be Announced  
Salina, Kansas

### **Heritage Trust Fund Workshop**

December 9, 2004  
10:00 a.m.  
Carnegie Center for the Arts  
701 Second  
Dodge City, Kansas

### **Heritage Trust Fund Workshop**

January 13, 2005  
2:00 p.m.  
Kansas History Center



Return Service Requested

### **KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Cultural Resources Division  
6425 S.W. Sixth Avenue  
Topeka, KS 66615-1099

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